

**THE CLASSIC PREACHERS OF
THE ENGLISH CHURCH:
LECTURES DELIVERED AT ST.
JAMES'S CHURCH IN 1877**

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The Classic Preachers of the English Church: Lectures Delivered at St. James's Church in 1877 by
John Edward Kempe

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KEMPE

THE
CLASSIC PREACHERS
OF THE
ENGLISH CHURCH.

LECTURES DELIVERED AT ST. JAMES'S CHURCH
IN 1877.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION.

SPEAKING of places of Christian worship, Hooker says "Our repair thither is especially for mutual conference and, as it were, commerce to be had between God and us;"* and whatever tends to defeat this end, or, indeed, does not forward it, can hardly fail to be prejudicial to the spiritual life of the Church.

A distinguished physicist has been heard to describe, almost in the same breath with the avowal of his inability to join in any religious service, as such, the great enjoyment which he derived from listening to anthems, chanting and hymns. In the province of devotion this was an example of what we may conceive to take place in that of religious teaching and exhortation. The attraction of able and interesting literary exertions may not only gather to the pulpit an auditory which neither seeks nor is likely to derive any spiritual benefit from such hearing, but may seriously mislead many persons

* 'Eecl. Pol.' V. xviii. 1.

who are not insensible of their need of that help which preaching is divinely appointed to afford. If they have but listened to the preacher with a moderate degree of attention, and still more if they have had any kind of unobjectionable pleasure in hearing him, they may go away persuaded that they have realised all the benefit of the ordinance, and fulfilled all their duty towards it; and yet its effect upon them may not have been at all more spiritual or religious than was that of sacred harmonies in the instance which has just been mentioned.* The notion that a religious duty is done when its forms have been perfunctorily observed, and well done when this has been accomplished pleasantly or easily, is but a variety of the theory of the *opus operatum*, and a very dangerous one too, because it is not so obviously and repulsively superstitious as are some of those which an enlightened Christianity will unhesitatingly reprobate.†

* "It is certain that a sermon, the conclusion whereof makes the auditory look pleased, and sets them all a-talking one with another, was either not right spoken or not right heard."—Burnet's 'Pastoral Care,' c. ix.

† In this connection I may be allowed to quote the following:—"Many persons were found at Church for the great Christian ceremonies, and at the theatres or even at the temples, for the

heathen spectacles. The ritual of the Church was viewed as a theatrical exhibition. The sermons were listened to as the displays of rhetoricians; and eloquent preachers were cheered with clapping of hands, stamping of feet, waving of handkerchiefs, cries of 'Orthodox!' 'Thirteenth Apostle!' and other like demonstrations, which such teachers as Chrysostom and Augustine often tried to restrain, in order that

At the same time it is easy to justify, though not without some reservation, the policy of making the service of the sanctuary attractive to the cultivated intellect as well as to a refined taste. The kind of considerations which may be allowed to prevail in recommendation of an element which is ceremonious, spectacular and sensuous in worship, may be extended with much less hesitation to efforts by which the intelligence of the community is sought to be conciliated towards the ministrations of the pulpit. It is surely a gain if minds which cannot otherwise be reached and feelings which cannot otherwise be moved by holy influences are, in any way which is not in itself

they might persuade their flocks to a more profitable manner of hearing. Some went to church for the sermon only, alleging that they could pray at home. And when the more attractive parts of the service were over, the great mass of the people departed, without remaining for the administration of the Eucharist. . . . Things which would have been good either as expressions of devotion or as means of training for it, became through their multiplication, and through the importance which was attached to them, too likely to be regarded as independent ends.—Robertson, 'History of the Christian Church,' Book II, c. vi., p. 356. Truly history, ecclesiastical as

well as civil, repeats itself. Let any one go to St. Paul's Cathedral, at an ordinary Sunday morning service, if he would see, that not only, as is the case in nearly every church, "without remaining for the administration of the Eucharist," but without even remaining to take away the text of the sermon, a great part of the congregation will still depart when the more attractive, i.e. the musical, portion of the service is over. It is impossible, however, to be too thankful for the improvement which has taken place of late years in the reverent and devotional tone and aspect as well as in the general "rendering" of the St. Paul's services.

prejudicial or unlawful, brought into a contact with sacred things from which spiritual profit may, at any rate, be fairly hoped for. Let us take the case of the Bible itself. If that Holy Volume had contained nothing but what the dullest might understand, the most unlettered interpret, and the most disputations agree about, a large number of those who now study it diligently, and not without advantage to their souls, would, for want of intellectual stimulus, read it, if at all, with most unprofitable distaste and weariness. Given, as it is, in a form which affords occasions so numerous and of such great variety for mental activity and power to be applied to it, many are drawn and fixed to its pages by the pleasant sense of a healthful and (so to say) manly intellectual exercise, and are thus familiarised with objects, modes of thought, and principles of conduct which are calculated to direct and colour those higher faculties whereby the soul of man can hold converse with Heaven. And that which is true of the Word written, is also true of the Word preached. The first point is to get an attentive and respectful hearing for it. This secured, it becomes comparatively easy to turn that hearing to its proper account.

But as, in the case of worship, the ceremonial will be anything but justifiable if it interposes a concealing or obscuring medium between the worshipper and the object of his worship, so, in that of preaching,